

Summary

Effective with the December 1997 edition, for the purposes of this report, children are defined as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipients under age 18. In addition, all average SSI payment amounts shown are based on the amount received in the month of the report, rather than the amount due in the following month. This is to conform to reporting methods used in other Social Security Administration (SSA) publications.

In December 2000, almost 850,000 blind and disabled children were receiving SSI payments. They made up 12.8 percent of the over 6.6 million SSI recipients in December. The December data reflect a decrease of over 4,000 child recipients since June 2000 (table 1).

To be eligible for SSI payments as a child, an individual must be under age 18, unmarried, and must meet the applicable SSI disability, income, resource, and diagnostic criteria.

The tables present a "snapshot" of selected program and demographic characteristics of children who receive SSI payments. Table 1 is based on universe counts. Tables 2–16 are based on SSI 10-percent sample files. The source record for all of the files is the Supplemental Security Record (SSR).

Applications and Awards

In calendar year 1999, the most recent year for which complete data are available, SSA received over 350,000 SSI applications for children (table 2). This represents 21 percent of the almost 1.7 million SSI applications received during that period.

Almost 140,000 children were awarded SSI payments in calendar year 1999 (table 3). This was over 18 percent of the nearly 760,000 persons awarded SSI in that period.

Historically, the percentages of both applications and awards for children have gradually increased over the years. Both rates rose rapidly in the early-to-mid 1990's, after the Zebley decision. They dropped off somewhat after the Welfare Reform legislation was enacted in 1996, but they now

appear to be again representing an increasing share of the overall applications and awards.

Payments

The average SSI payment to children in December 2000 was \$447 (table 5). This amount includes federally administered state supplementation where applicable, but does not include any retroactive payments.

The states with the largest numbers of children receiving SSI were California, New York, Florida, Texas, Pennsylvania, Illinois, Ohio, Michigan and North Carolina. Together they accounted for 52 percent of all child recipients.

Table 6 shows the number and percentage distribution of the amount of the federal SSI payments to children. Sixty-five percent of the children received \$512 at that time. \$512 is the maximum monthly amount of federal SSI payable in 2000 to persons with no countable income.

Demographic Characteristics

Age

In December 2000, 16 percent of the children receiving SSI were under 5 years old. The remainder of those children under age 18 was fairly evenly distributed by age (table 7).

Sex

Child recipients are more likely to be boys than girls, by about three to two (table 7). This is generally the same gender pattern found among adult disabled recipients.

Living Arrangements

Four out of five of the children lived with their parent(s) (table 7). Another 14 percent were identified as living in their own household for purposes of payment determination. For the most part, these children lived with other relatives, in hospitals, nursing homes, residential schools, foster care, or independently. Less than 2 percent were patients in a medical facility where more than half of the cost of their care is covered by the Medicaid program.

Citizenship

Nearly all (99 percent) of the children were U.S. citizens, either by birth or naturalization (table 7).

Diagnosis

Almost two out of three children (63 percent) were disabled because of a mental disorder, and the largest percentage of this group (33 percent) were mentally retarded (table 8). The only other sizable diagnostic category was diseases of the nervous system and sense organs (12 percent), which included all of the approximately 6,600 blind children on SSI in December 2000. (This distribution is based on the diagnoses of the 94 percent of children for whom a diagnostic code is available on the SSR).

The incidence of mental retardation as a primary diagnosis increased with age, from 3 percent of those under age 3 to 46 percent of those aged 13–17. The same pattern appeared among those under age 18 with psychiatric disorders.

The only diagnostic category with a significant difference between sexes was other psychiatric disorders, 34 percent of the males versus 20 percent of the females (table 9). There was no substantial variation between sexes in the other diagnostic categories.

Adult Recipients Who Began As Children

In addition to the 843,000 recipients who are currently considered as children for program purposes, the SSI rolls in December 2000 included 523,000 adult recipients who first became eligible for SSI payments before age 18 (table 10). Thirty-three percent of these recipients first became eligible during the 1974–80 period, and thus appear to have been receiving SSI for much of their lives.

Income

About one in four children (26 percent) had income in December 2000, and most of these had only unearned income (table 11). The most frequent types of cash unearned income were Social Security benefits (7 percent) or support payments from an absent parent (11 percent). Another 1 percent were receiving income based on need (most frequently from the Temporary Assistance to

Needy Families (TANF) program, formerly known as AFDC), while 7 percent had some type of in-kind income that was considered for SSI purposes. About 74 percent of the children had no income reported on their record.

Parents in the Household

Over three-fifths of the children (62 percent) were living with one parent, and another 24 percent lived with two parents (table 12). For the 13 percent with no parent in the household, deeming of income from a parent to a child recipient does not apply, and information about parents is not part of the SSI record.

One-Parent Household

Of the 62 percent of SSI recipient children who live with only one parent, nearly all (95 percent) lived with their mother (table 13). Only 5 percent lived with their father.

For 39 percent of the children in a one-parent household, that parent had no reported income (the SSI payment is not considered as income in this analysis). Over one-third of the children (35 percent) lived with a parent who had earned income, while for 31 percent of the children the parent had unearned income. Mother-headed households showed about the same distribution, while father-headed homes were a little more likely to have some income and earnings, and a little less likely to have unearned income.

Even where there was some income in the household, the amounts were small. Thirty percent of the children were in homes with under \$200 income in the month of December 2000. Only 52 percent of them had \$600 or more in income that month. Children living with a father were more likely to have higher family incomes.

Two-Parent Household

The 24 percent of SSI children who live with two parents were relatively better off economically than those living with only one parent (table 14). Fourteen percent of the former had parents with no reported income, compared with 39 percent of those living with one parent. Also, 62 percent of the two-parent households had income of \$1,000 per month or more, compared with 20 percent of the children in one-parent households.

Mothers were less likely to have income if there was another parent in the household than were single parent mothers. Sixty-two percent of mothers in two-parent households had no income, compared with 39 percent of single mothers.

Parental Income

Almost three-fifths of the children (59 percent) lived in a household where the parent(s) received some type of income, which averaged \$1,039 in December (table 15). About 39 percent of the children had one or both parents with earnings, averaging \$1,404; 26 percent had some type of unearned income, averaging \$265. The most common type of unearned income was public income-maintenance (PIM) payments. This includes TANF payments, Department of Veterans Affairs payments based on need, and other governmental programs.

Parent-to-Child Deeming

In households where the parent(s) of SSI children receive income, that income must be considered in determining the child's payment amount. This process is called deeming. Certain types of parental income are excluded from deeming.¹ This includes PIM payments and any parental income used to determine the amount of the PIM payments. In addition, allocations and exclusions reduce the amount used in the child's payment computation.

About 68 percent of the children subject to deeming had one or more parents with reported income in December (table 16). Of these children, deemed income affected the payment of only 27 percent, after all exclusions and allocations were applied. Children living with two parents (36 percent) were more likely to have their payment affected by deemed income than children living with one parent (23 percent).

¹ See 20 CFR 416.1161(a).